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ABSTRACT

Inviting students to look, explore, and think, this booklet offers practical ways for teachers to use museums--in particular, the artworks, artifacts, collections, and other materials they contain--as a basis for secondary students' writing. If taking students on field trips is not feasible, educators can adapt most of the activities in the booklet for use in the classroom. The key concepts in the booklet are based on the tenet that writing is a skill students can develop through practice, trial, and error. The teacher's role in the activities in the booklet is to guide students through writing, emphasizing process in addition to product. The booklet presents five major activities--Telling a Painting's Story; Conversing with an Object; Explaining How Things Work; Telling Your Story; Creating a Classroom Museum; and Beyond the Museum--as well as advice on how educators can design their own activities. A 15-item annotated list of additional resources is attached. (RS)

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Using Museums as Resources for Student Writing

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COLLECTING THEIR THOUGHTS

Using Museums as Resources for Student Writing

Based on the writing workshops developed by Thomas F. Lowderbaugh, Ph.D., Deputy Director for Administration, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Smithsonian Institution

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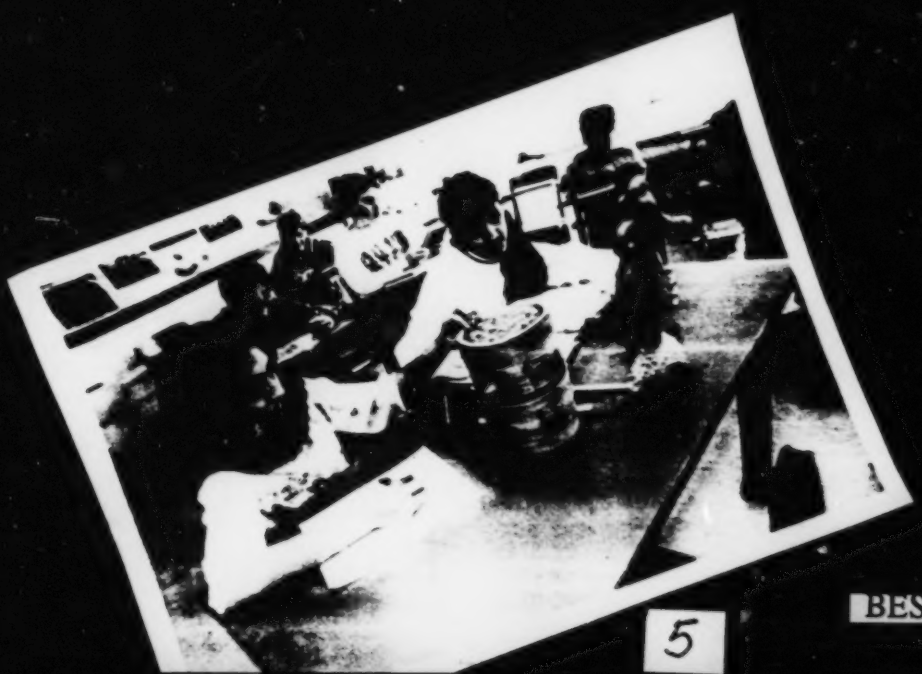

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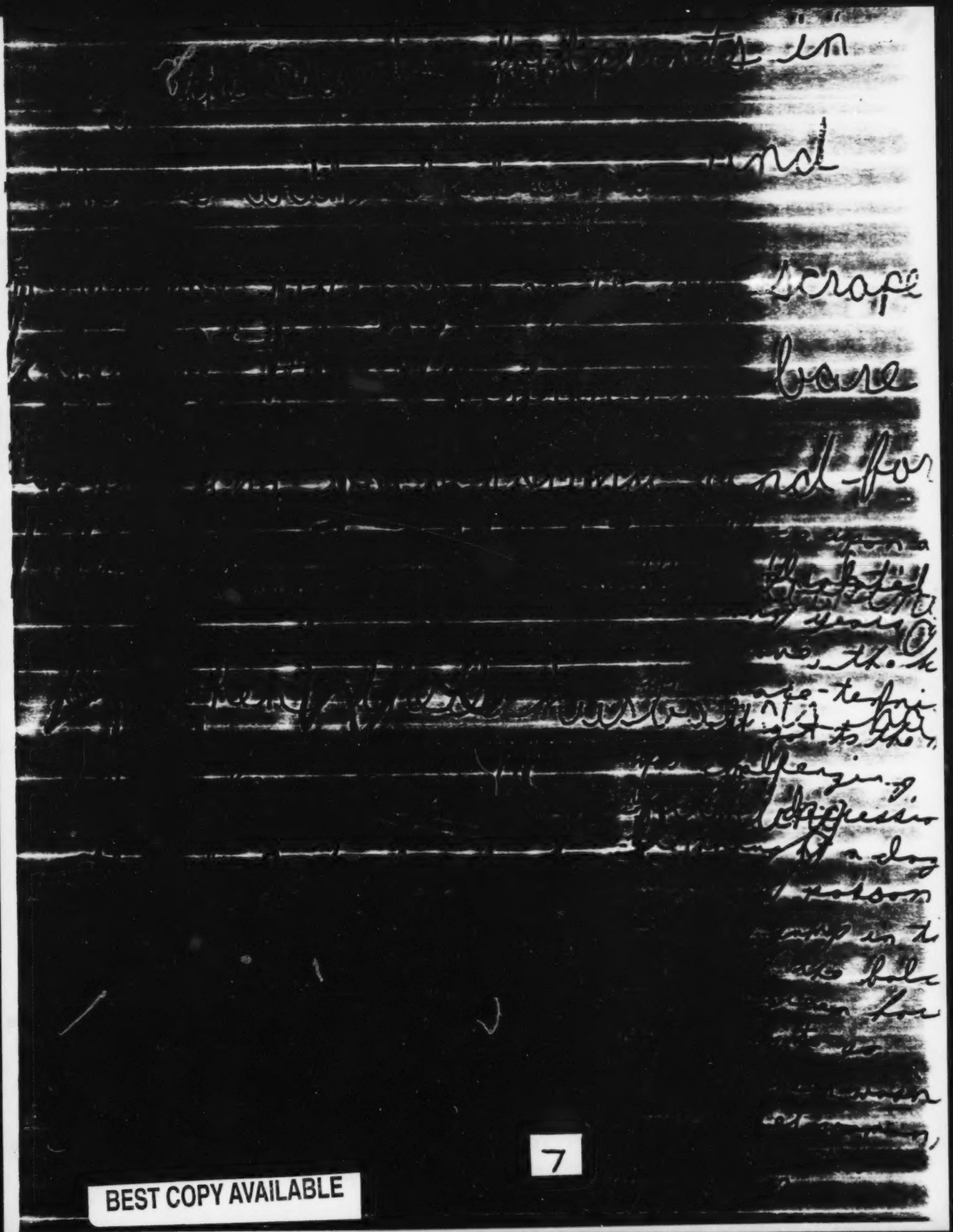

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CONTENTS

Introduction 7

How to Use This Booklet 9

Designing Your Own Activities 11

Activities 13

Telling a Painting's Story 13

Conversing with an Object 25

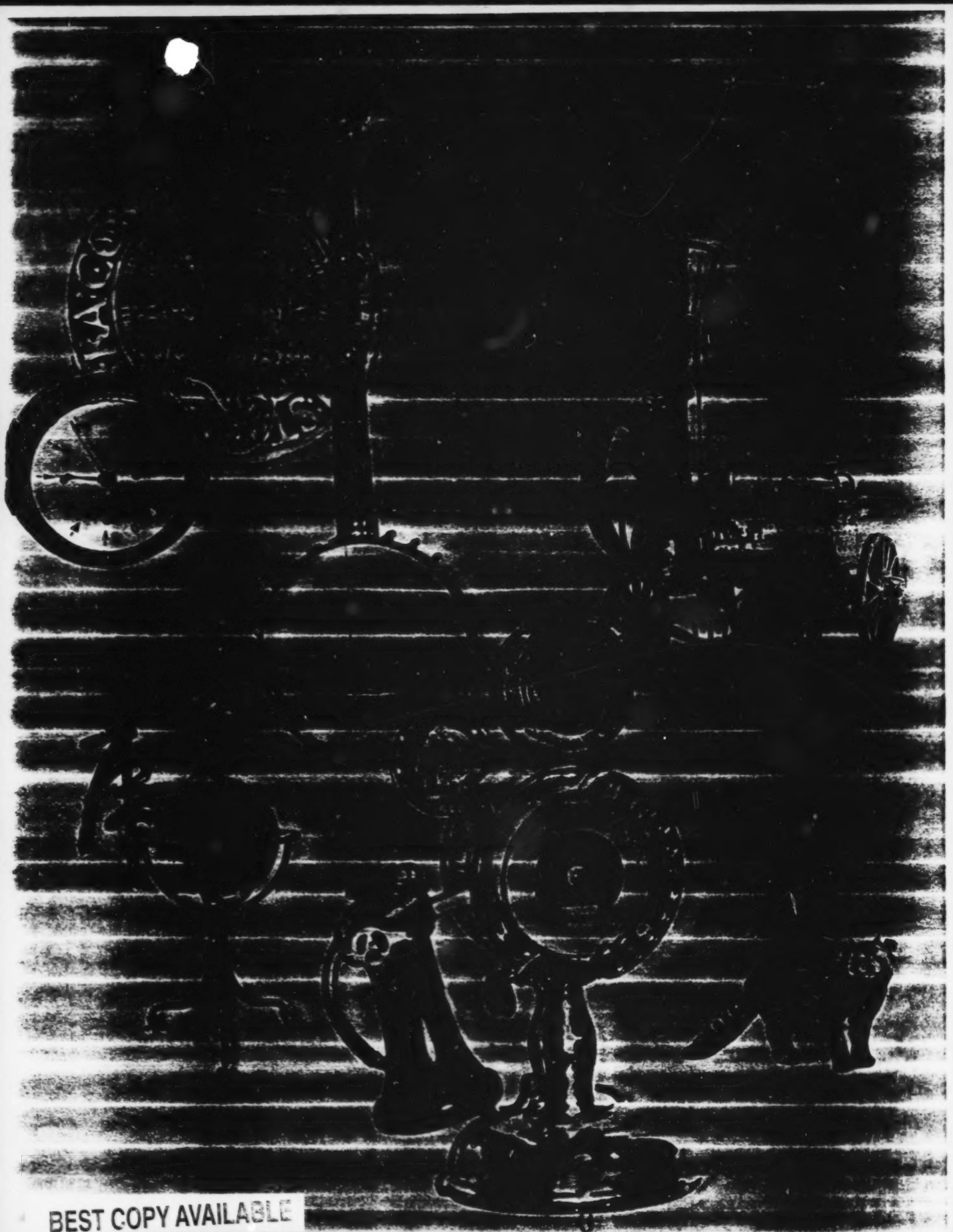
Explaining How Things Work 31

Telling Your Story 37

Creating a Classroom Museum 49

Beyond the Museum 59

Additional Resources 63



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INTRODUCTION

Collecting Their Thoughts offers practical ways for teachers to use museums—in particular, the artworks, artifacts, collections, and other materials they contain—as a basis for student writing. Emphasizing the *process* of writing, rather than simply the end product, the activities in this booklet invite students to look, explore, and think. These activities grew out of the Smithsonian's writing workshops for teachers, which have been offered to Washington, D.C. audiences, as well as national audiences, for fifteen years. Designed primarily for use in grades 7 through 12, *Collecting Their Thoughts* translates the workshops' approaches into print to enable many more teachers to make better use of their local museums.

While the Smithsonian's writing workshops take advantage of the Institution's immense collections—over 140 million objects—the approaches put forth in *Collecting Their Thoughts* will work in any community. Local museums, historic houses, and nature centers contain many of the same kinds of primary-source objects that are on display in Smithsonian museums. But if taking students on field trips isn't feasible, you can adapt most of the activities in this booklet for use right in the classroom. (See "How to Use This Booklet" on page nine for more about how to do this. And for ideas on how to use non-museum community resources as a basis for writing activities, see page 59.)

The key concepts included in *Collecting Their Thoughts* are based on principles that are widely accepted by writing teachers. Foremost among these is the tenet that writing is a skill students can develop through practice, trial, and error. The teacher's role is to guide students through writing, emphasizing process in addition to product.

While this approach to writing isn't new, *Collecting Their Thoughts* brings to it a new emphasis on museums and the objects, exhibitions, and primary sources they contain. By setting objects *apart*—by putting them in a display case, for example—museums can help students focus their attention. And by bringing

objects together in exhibitions that present different aspects of history, science, or the arts, museums provide context. The context museums provide can help students derive greater understanding of objects and can encourage them to make connections between seemingly unrelated items and subjects.

Another advantage of using museums to teach writing is that many museums provide hands-on experiences that students can later draw on in their writing. For example, interactive exhibits may provide opportunities for students to estimate the size of a rocket, identify an insect's chirp, feel the texture of an animal's hide, build a replica of a colonial chair, or play an antique musical instrument. Such one-on-one experiences provide a real-life basis for descriptive writing.

Museums are also natural venues for promoting critical thinking skills. The activities in this booklet take advantage of this by calling on students to observe, compare, and classify museum objects and exhibitions as part of the writing process. By developing these skills students can discover, among other things, that reference books are not the only sources of information—and that even their own observations, if carefully recorded, can provide valuable reference material.

The activities in *Collecting Their Thoughts* can do more than help students improve their writing. They can also enhance the museum-going experience itself—not only while students are participating in the activities, but also during future museum visits. It's our hope that, by helping students to discover the stories embodied in museum objects and in other community resources—stories of the people who used, discovered, or collected these objects—the activities in *Collecting Their Thoughts* will inspire not only good writing, but also a lifetime of enjoyable museum experiences.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Collecting Their Thoughts contains five activities, as well as several suggestions for other ways you can take advantage of non-museum resources in your community. Although you can conduct most of the activities in any order, we suggest that you start with one or both of the first two activities (starting on pages 13 and 25, respectively). These activities are designed to help students focus by having them make careful observations of museum objects. Since learning to observe is a logical first step in the process of learning to write, either of these activities makes a good starting point for a unit on writing.

Keep in mind that, although *Collecting Their Thoughts* focuses on museums and museum objects, you can easily adapt the activities to other situations. As we mentioned earlier, nature centers, historic sites, and related community resources lend themselves well to the activities in this booklet. (See "Designing Your Own Activities" on page 11 for information about how to use your communities' resources to develop your own materials.) But you can also conduct many of the activities without ever leaving the classroom. For example, instead of taking your class to an art museum and having the students write stories based on the paintings on display (see "Telling a Painting's Story" on page 13), you can bring in prints or postcards of paintings for the students to build their stories around. And if you aren't able to have your students observe and write about a demonstration given at a museum or historic site (see "Explaining How Things Work" on page 31), perhaps you can arrange to have a demonstrator come into your classroom.

Of course, visiting a museum or other site can enhance the children's learning experience—but such visits require planning. Here are some hints that can help you and your students get the most out of museums and the activities in this booklet.

- Try to visit the museum yourself a few weeks before you take your class. Familiarize yourself with the museum's layout, locating restrooms, shops, cafeterias, and classrooms. Note which exhibitions are in which galleries, and

obtain a floor plan and background information to study. Also pick up copies of the floor plan for your students or reproduce your copy. Shortly before the trip, go over the floor plan with the group so they'll be somewhat familiar with how the museum is laid out.

Talk with the museum's outreach, education, or public programs staff well before your trip. Tell them about your class writing project and ask if visitors are allowed to carry backpacks, bring pens or pencils into the galleries, or sit on the floor while they write. The staff members can help by notifying guards about the students' visit, and some may even be able to assist you during the visit. Staff members can also make sure that the exhibition you wish to visit will be open when you bring your class.

If parents or volunteers will be helping to chaperone your visit, prepare them ahead of time. Let them know which parts of the museum you plan to use, and familiarize them with the steps in the lesson and the kinds of questions the students might ask. Make sure that they understand the purpose of the visit and the activities you have planned.

Model the activity in the classroom before going to the museum. If students are familiar with the process ahead of time, they will be better able to focus on the objects and exhibitions.

Once you and your group are at the museum, review its layout and features. You may also want to walk through the museum with your students before starting the activity.

Write with your students! By working on the writing assignments yourself at the same time that your students are working on them, you can demonstrate not only that you value writing, but also that everyone must work to produce good results. In addition, you will learn from firsthand experience how much of a challenge each activity presents.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN ACTIVITIES

If you like the approaches used in Collecting Their Thoughts *and would like to design similar activities tailored to your own community's strengths, the following tips should help you get started:*

Assess Your Community's Resources

Not every community has a large museum with extensive collections on a variety of topics, but almost all communities have valuable resources that can inspire your students to write. Statues, memorials, landmarks—these and other objects have stories to tell, and they'll provide a good foundation for writing activities similar to the ones presented in this booklet. Opportunities for writing are also available in local parks, nature centers, historic buildings, and other community locations.

If your school's budget does not permit field trips, you can bring objects into the classroom (or have students bring them in). You may also be able to arrange to have another important community "resource" come into the classroom: Many hobbyists, artisans, writers, collectors, and others are happy to share their knowledge with young people. Does someone in your community make musical instruments? Collect Japanese prints? Do historical dramatizations? Such people can often infuse students with their enthusiasm. Consider them, especially, for activities in which students write about a process.

When arranging to have speakers or demonstrators come into the classroom, keep in mind that such guests appreciate a clear idea about what you would like them to do and how long you would like their program to last. It's also helpful if you can let your guests know how their presentation fits into your lesson. Such guidelines will help them fit their program to your needs.

Work with Museum Educators

If you decide to build activities around the exhibitions at a local museum, there may be staff people there who can help you. At the very least, a staff member should be able to help your students become familiar with the museum by leading them on a tour. In addition, though, there may be education specialists who can help you develop your activities. (Many museums also have activity sheets and other materials that you may find useful.)

Museum staff members may also be able to be on hand to answer students' questions or to provide interesting historical or other information that students could incorporate into their writing.

Work with Other Teachers

Developing activities that draw upon museums and other community resources can take time and effort, so you may want to consider collaborating with at least one other teacher. Besides being able to share the workload, working with other teachers will allow you to share information about community resources. As part of such a cooperative venture, you could also have your students work with those from another class. For example, students in the two classes could critique and edit each other's writing.

Involve Your Students

Invite students to participate in designing writing activities. One way to do this is to ask them what they would like to learn about their own community, and to use their ideas as a basis for one or more activities. Another way to get students involved is to help them choose an audience. Knowing ahead of time who they will be writing for will help students focus their writing.

Woman
yell
Sunburst
tick
grin

turquoise
explosion
gold
sky
drips

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TELLING A PAINTING'S STORY

One of the greatest qualities of art is the way it "speaks" to each one of us: People may share opinions about a work of art, and even feel similar emotional responses—but ultimately, our reactions to art and our interpretations of it are as individual and unique as we are. In this activity your students can express their unique responses to art by writing stories inspired by paintings in an art museum.

Overview

Students visit a museum and choose a painting to work with. They list details of the work, then write a description designed to help others imagine what the painting looks like. Afterward, students write stories about their paintings based on their descriptions.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- ▶ closely observe a work of art
- ▶ list concrete details in the work
- ▶ select the most important details to include in a descriptive paragraph
- ▶ distinguish between factual and judgmental language
- ▶ write a descriptive text using only facts
- ▶ write a story using both facts and judgmental language

Materials

paper and pens or pencils; clipboards

Photographed at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden at an exhibition of paintings by Willem de Kooning from the Hirshhorn Museum Collection

Preparation

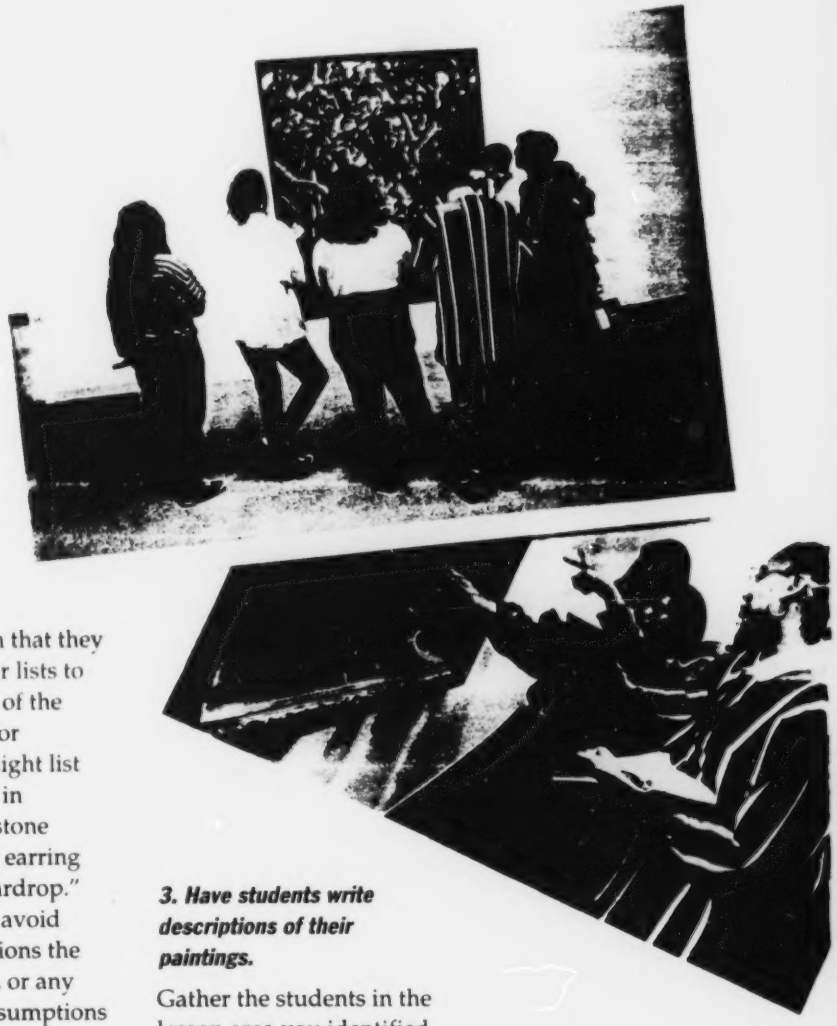
1. Visit an art museum and become familiar with its paintings.

Take note of the locations of paintings that will lend themselves well to the activity—i.e., realistic works portraying at least one human figure. Such paintings will facilitate a student's sense of connection to the work and will provide plenty of visual stimulation to pique students' imaginations. (Before going to the museum, you may want to model the activity in class so the students will know what to expect. One way to do this is to buy reproductions of paintings, in the form of slides or postcards, at the museum. Bring them into the classroom before your trip to the museum, and have the students complete steps 2 through 5 under "At the Museum," which begins on page 15.)

2. Ask museum educators or public programs staff members if there's an area where you can conduct part of the lesson.

Students will need a relatively quiet area for writing in the museum. Explain that a classroom is not necessary; you can use a corner of a gallery as long as other groups don't also need the area. Make sure that guards know in advance what you'll be doing and where.

At the Museum



1. Have students choose paintings.

Take the students on a brief tour of the museum, pointing out several works of art that you find appropriate for the activity. During the tour, tell the students to note the names and locations of those works that interest them. Explain that each person will be writing about one of the paintings. Then have each person choose a painting for the assignment.

2. Have students make lists of the details in their paintings.

Give the students about fifteen minutes to get to know their paintings. To do this, they should observe the work they've chosen and make a list of as many details describing its appearance as is possible. Explain that they should limit their lists to physical aspects of the painting itself. For example, they might list "orange flowers in background by stone fence" or "silver earring shaped like a teardrop." But they should avoid listing any emotions the painting evokes, or any judgments or assumptions they might have about the work. For example, they could write something like "hands folded, eyes closed" but should avoid such language as "lost in prayer" or "sad and downhearted." Making judgments about the relationships between people in the pictures—e.g., "mother and son"—is also inappropriate.

Items that students can count ("three trees on left" or "four waves to left of boat," for example) are good candidates for listing. So are physical aspects of the painting that aren't visible (e.g., "left hand behind back").

3. Have students write descriptions of their paintings.

Gather the students in the lesson area you identified during your preparation for the activity. Give them several minutes to write descriptions of their paintings, using the list of details they created in step 2 and their memory of the work as a whole. Explain that they should describe their paintings in such a way that a person reading their description could easily find the work in the museum. Students should not try to list all of the details that they collected; instead, they must decide

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which ones would be most important to include in a description—ones that would give readers a good idea of what the painting looked like. Also tell students that they should avoid using language that makes assumptions about what's happening in the painting (e.g., "sadly looking for lost love") or that expresses their own opinions in any way (e.g., "ugly red barn"). For now, the point is simply to focus on what physically appears in the painting.

4. Ask volunteers to read their descriptions aloud.

After each reading, ask the listeners to name whatever details they remember. If two or more students wrote about the same painting, discuss the similarities and differences in the two descriptions. Also discuss any judgmental language that may have slipped into the descriptions, explaining that the focus here is on "just the facts." Ask students how judgmental language can portray more than just facts. (It conveys the viewer's interpretation of the painting and possibly his or her own feelings about it.)

5. Have students create drawings based on each other's descriptions.

Assign students into pairs, making sure that the members of each pair did not work with the same painting. Have the students in each pair read each other's descriptions. Then, using the descriptions as a guide, they should try to sketch what they think the described painting looks like.

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6. Give students time to find the paintings.

Give the students in each pair ten minutes or so to try to find the paintings their partners described. (Partners can accompany those searching for the paintings, but they mustn't give them any hints.) Allow students to take the descriptions, as well as their drawings, with them as they search.

7. Have students evaluate their descriptions.

After the students have had time to try to find the paintings their partners described, gather them together to discuss the effectiveness of the descriptions. Start by asking the students how many of them found the paintings their partners described. Have volunteers discuss the aspects of the descriptions that helped them find the correct painting.

Then ask several of the students to re-read the descriptions they wrote. Have their partners share the sketches they created. Based on the sketches and the ease or difficulty the sketchers had in finding the correct paintings, do the students who wrote these particular descriptions think their descriptions "work"? How might they be improved? (Remind students that not everyone is an artist, so they can't necessarily expect that their descriptions would result in highly detailed drawings. But a good description might lead the person doing the drawing to include some of the highlights of the real painting.)

8. Give students time to write stories about their paintings.

To help the students combine the visible aspects of art with the feelings and ideas art inspires, give them thirty minutes or more to write stories about their paintings. Explain that the students should use their descriptions of the paintings as a basis for creating their stories, but allow them to revisit the paintings if they want to. Tell the students that, unlike their descriptions, the stories don't have to stick to physical facts. Any emotions or judgments the students wish to incorporate into their stories—and any way they wish to interpret what's happening in the paintings—is fine.

One way students might want to approach their stories is to focus on what's currently happening in the painting. Explain that, if they take this approach, it might be helpful to treat the painting as if it were a frozen frame in a movie. To set the painting into motion, they can mentally "unfreeze" the frame.

Other approaches to telling the painting's story include writing about what has just happened, or about what is going to happen. But explain to the students that, whatever they write, they must not contradict any of the painting's visible elements.

9. Have students share their stories.

If possible, have students read their stories to the group in front of the paintings they wrote about.

Student Writing

Jessica L. Douthit, a student in Jeff Miner's ninth-grade English class at Pilgrim High School in Warwick, Rhode Island, wrote a list of details and a description of a painting by 19th-century American artist Fitz Hugh Lane. Her story about the painting follows on page 20.

Fitz Hugh Lane
View of Little Good Harbor Beach, Cape Ann

Museum of Art,
Rhode Island School of Design
Jesse Metcalf Fund

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Details

pale blue sky, clouds on horizon line and in air

4 sailboats, 2 rowboats on the water

2 trees with branches of leaves

1 tree without any leaves

1 horse attached to a cart

1 man in the cart wearing blue shirt, holding horse reins

bucket of red flowers on back of cart

horse and cart are on a dirt road

3 rocks on beach

1 pail on beach

1 man on shore with a hat on, light shirt, with a blue jacket over his shoulder, his hand in the air

man on a rowboat close to man on beach, 2 hands on a stick in the water

a fence

1 man in a sailboat holding 1 stick with both hands

1 man on the beach has both hands on the sailboat

1 rock in front of cart

lighthouse in distance

piece of land that sticks out in the water

hill, rocks in front, and many trees and a white house

Description

The picture has a pale blue sky with clouds on the horizon line and in the sky. There is land surrounding water. On the water there is a total of six boats: four sailboats and two rowboats. On one of the rowboats there is a man with part of a fishnet in his hand and part of the fishnet in the water. On the left side of the drawing there are two trees. The smaller of the two trees is on the hill in the distance. The larger of the two is near a fence and a cart. The cart is attached to a horse with a white nose. The man on the cart has a hat on his head and has on a pale blue shirt. There is a bucket of red flowers on the back of the cart. The cart and horse are on a dirt road. Also on the left side of the picture is a rock in the bottom corner. On the right side there is a tree without any leaves. There is also a beach. On the beach there is a pail. There is a total of two men on the beach. One man has both hands on a boat. The other man has a hat on and an object of clothing over his right shoulder. He is holding a stick. Also on the right side there is a piece of land that sticks out in the water. The land is hilly, has many trees, and a white house. In the distance you can see a lighthouse.

On Cape Ann

The small town of Metcalf on Cape Ann was pleasant and peaceful. Most of the people who lived there were either farmers, fishermen, or merchants. One quiet morning in April, Mr. Edwards decided to go into town to purchase some flowers. The flowers he purchased were a deep red and he knew Mrs. Edwards would love them.

On his way back home he decided to take his time so he could actually enjoy the scenery. Mr. Edwards was always rushing around, and after living in the same town for twenty years, he wasn't able to look at the beauty around him. Mr. Edwards owned and worked on a farm with his wife and two of their three children. His oldest son, Christopher, was a fisherman.

When Mr. Edwards was riding back, he rode past Little Good Harbor. He noticed his son was just about to sail his boat on the harbor. His friend Joshua was helping him by pushing his boat out onto the water. Then Mr. Edwards looked out on the water. He had never noticed how smooth and beautiful it was. Then he glanced at the piece of land sticking out into the water. On that piece of land was his house. He never noticed that either.

After he had passed by the harbor and was on his way home, he thought to himself, "I have missed so much in the twenty years I have lived here. There is so much more to be seen."

When he arrived at home, he surprised Mrs. Edwards with the flowers and he also told her and the children they could take the day off from all the work on the farm. They couldn't believe their father was saying this. Then Mr. Edwards said, "We are going to take a ride through the country." They were so happy that his youngest son threw his hat in the air and his wife and daughter threw their bonnets in the air, and they all cheered.

Jessica L. Douthit

Student Handout

Teacher Jeff Miner prepared this pre-visit handout for his ninth-grade Honors English class's visit to the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

Listing details
15 minutes

- List every detail that you see in the work.
- Do NOT include emotions the work causes.
- Do NOT include reactions to the content of the work.

Suggestions

- List countable things, such as all the red, blue, or black items in the work.
- List all the things that are NOT in the picture. For example, is someone holding a hand behind his or her back? Is a tree trunk hidden behind a building?

Writing a short description of the work
15 minutes

- Provide information but withhold all judgments.
- Write so that a reader could instantly recognize the work.

Sharing descriptions
20 minutes

As you listen to your classmates' papers, keep these questions in mind:

- What details do you remembe from the description?
- Did the writer include any comments that were not just descriptions? If so, what were they?

Writing a story about the work
30 minutes

Tell the "story" of the painting.

- Think of the painting as a frame of a movie. "Unfreeze" the frame, and set the painting into motion.
- Write the story of either what is happening in the work, what has just happened, or what is about to happen.
- Mentally push the painting's frame back and tell the enlarged story.

Student Writing

Danielle DeCaprio's
7 student in Lila
Hirschmann's ninth grade
English class at John Jay
High School in Hopewell
Junction, New York

Henri Matisse
The Window

© 1993 Succession
H. Matisse/VAGA, New York

Details

chair
table
flowers
basket
window
curtains
radiator
rug
white
blue
brown
black
yellow
tree
green
grey
sunlight
wall
floor

Brainstorm

Setting: the room, spring, New York

Characters: him and her

Plot: where and how they met

Notes

he enters
she's beautiful
they chat
she's southern
he's from New York
argument about what will happen when she leaves
asks her to stay

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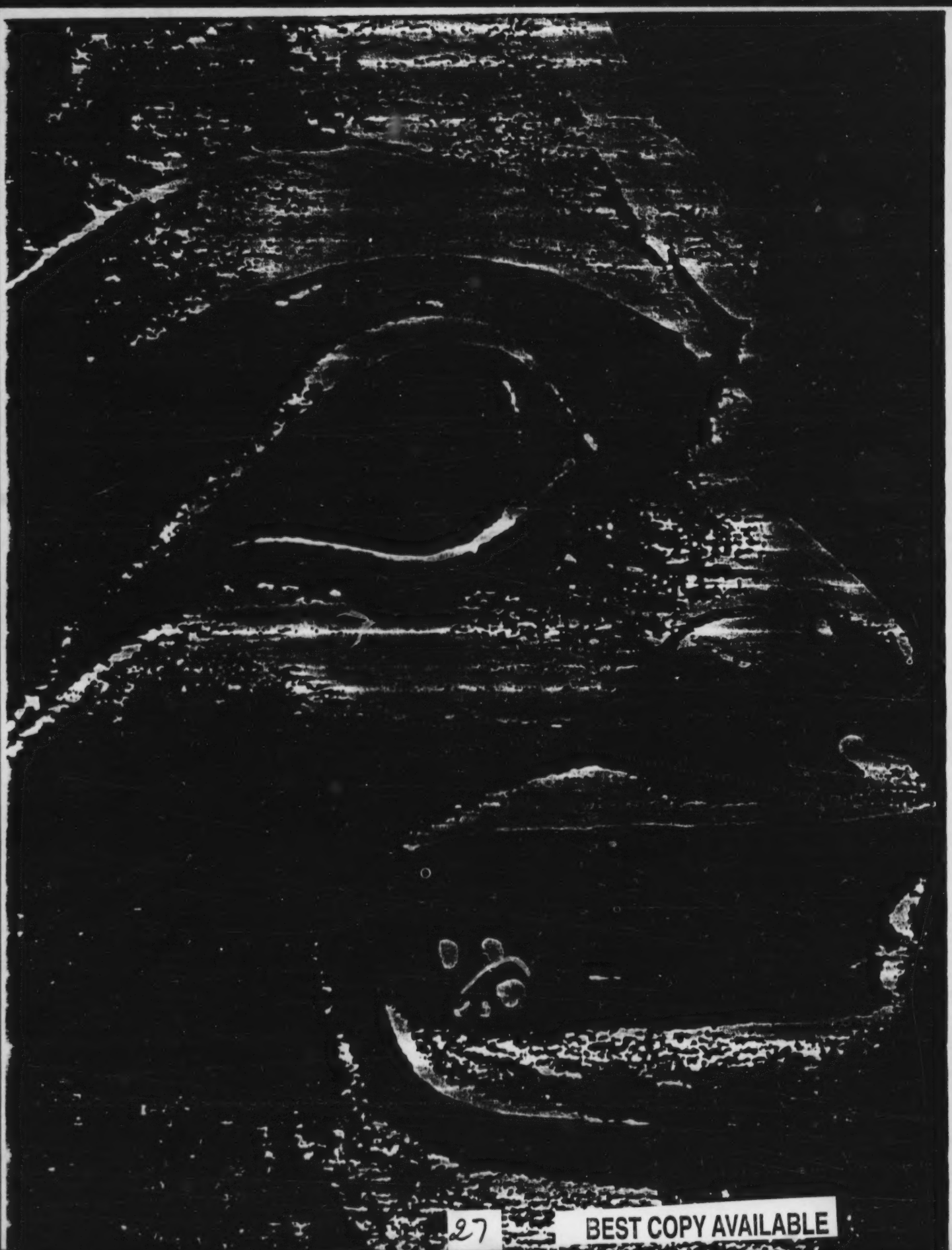
The Window

He enters the room. She is sitting in the chair. The chair is one of two in the room. She is seated by the open window. Her beautiful red hair blows with the wind. He takes the other seat, which is by the wall. Next to him is a wastebasket, which he uses as an ash tray. She doesn't like him to smoke but she doesn't try to stop him, at least not now.

He can tell she's been crying. He asks her what is wrong. She says that she must go back. He is speechless. All he can manage to say is a low, "no." He tries to convince her to stay but when the discussion is over neither is happy. He tells her that if she must go, to go. They decide to go out for dinner one last time before her departure. They leave the room.

After she goes, he can never bring himself to enter the blue room again.

Danielle De Caprio



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CONVERSING WITH AN OBJECT

If an ancient Japanese ceramic vessel could speak, what would it say? How about an African mask—or the monstrous skeleton of a prehistoric giant sloth? And what might these things say to one another? By "talking" with objects and creating conversations between different objects, your students can bring artifacts, artworks, fossils, and other items to life. It's an effective way for students to connect with museum objects that might otherwise seem strange or intimidating, and it's a good way for them to practice writing dialogue.

Overview

Students create written conversations using objects.

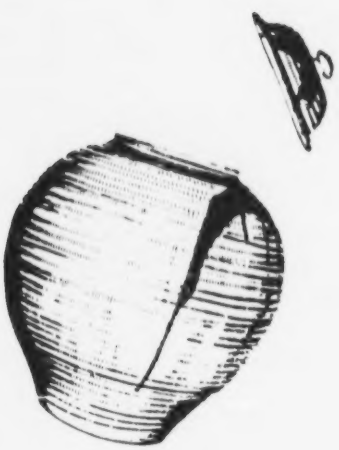
Objectives

Students will be able to:

- ▶ formulate questions or statements about unfamiliar objects
- ▶ write a dialogue
- ▶ discuss two or more facts about a museum object

Materials

common objects; paper and pens or pencils; clipboards; samples of magazine interviews (optional)



Preparation

1. Visit the museum and decide which area or exhibit will lend itself best to the activity.

The museum portion of this activity can work particularly well when tied in with a specific curriculum area or theme. For example, if your students have been studying insects, you could take them to a natural history museum's insect display. There they could use what they've been learning, in addition to any information in the display, to create interesting dialogues between different insect specimens or between themselves and a specimen. Similarly, if your class has been learning about a particular period in art history, a visit to an art museum containing paintings from this period could provide plenty of material for students to write about. They could, among other things, write a dialogue between the "characters" in a particular painting.

2. If possible, arrange to have a curator, museum educator, or docent work with your group when you get to the museum.

Such a person can be on hand during your field trip to help answer questions students may have about the objects they've chosen to work with.

3. Gather together at least a dozen objects.

You will be using these objects in steps 2, 3, and 4 of the "In the Classroom" portion of the activity, which models the museum portion. Just about any familiar objects will do, especially those with a clear function, such as kitchen utensils, household tools, and office supplies. Other possibilities include objects that students have an affinity for (CDs, radios, jewelry, rollerblades, soda cans), and objects that were once part of a living thing (seashells, feathers, leaves, bones).

In the Classroom

1. Review the conventions for writing dialogue.

Discuss the concept of *dialogue* with the students, pointing out that written dialogue is a conversation on paper. Go over the use of quotation marks and rules for indentation. (You may want to give students the option of writing their dialogues in interview style. If so, bring in samples of magazine interviews and go over this style as well.)

2. Have students choose objects to write about.

Display the objects you gathered during your preparation. Explain that each student will be writing a dialogue between two of the objects on display. Give them a few minutes to think about which objects might have an interesting conversation if they could speak to one another. Tell students that the objects they choose can be related in some way (such as a bottle of soda and a glass), but they don't necessarily have to be.

3. Give students at least twenty minutes to write their dialogues.

To help them get started, suggest some topics that their objects might talk about. For example, objects could compare their functions, discuss where they live (in the pantry, in the refrigerator, in a student's desk, etc.) and describe what a typical day in their lives is like. You might also want to suggest to students that they give their objects personalities or certain characteristics. For example, a cactus could have a "prickly" personality; a dictionary could have an excellent vocabulary.

4. Have students read or perform several of the dialogues.

Collect the students' work. If possible, select several pieces that give clues to the objects' identities without giving them away. (If you can't find any, select some that the writers could modify slightly to achieve "anonymity.") Have the writer of each piece, along with one other student, read or perform the conversation. Ask the group if they can say which objects are having the discussion.

At the Museum

1. Have each student choose one or more objects to write about.

Explain to the students that they'll once again be writing dialogues using objects—only this time they can choose to either create a conversation between two different objects or between themselves and an object. Then lead the students through the museum and tell them to be thinking about which object or objects they'd like to focus on. To help them decide, suggest that they choose objects that they think might have something interesting to say if the objects could talk.

2. Give students time to write their dialogues.

After walking through the museum, have the students locate the objects they want to work with, and then give them at least twenty minutes to write their dialogues. Encourage them to use their imaginations in their conversations, but tell them they must also include some factual information about the objects themselves. Suggest that their dialogues address two or more of the following bits of information:

what the object is

how the object is (or was) used, if appropriate

the object's age

who made the object, if appropriate

where the object originated

a description and explanation of at least one of the object's features

Students can use the information provided in the display as a source of facts about their objects, or they can ask a museum docent or other staff person that you've lined up to be on hand for the lesson.

If students seem to be having a hard time getting started, you might want to suggest some questions they could ask in their dialogues, such as:

How do the objects feel about living in a museum and being in the public eye day after day?

Who are some of the people or things in the objects' existence (i.e., previous owners, other objects that the object spent time with, other items nearby)?

Do the objects have a secret existence that people don't know about? For example, do they carry on conversations with one another when all the people lock up the museum and go home?

Back in the Classroom

1. Have the students read or perform several of the dialogues.

Follow the directions for step 4 of the "In the Classroom" section.

Extension:

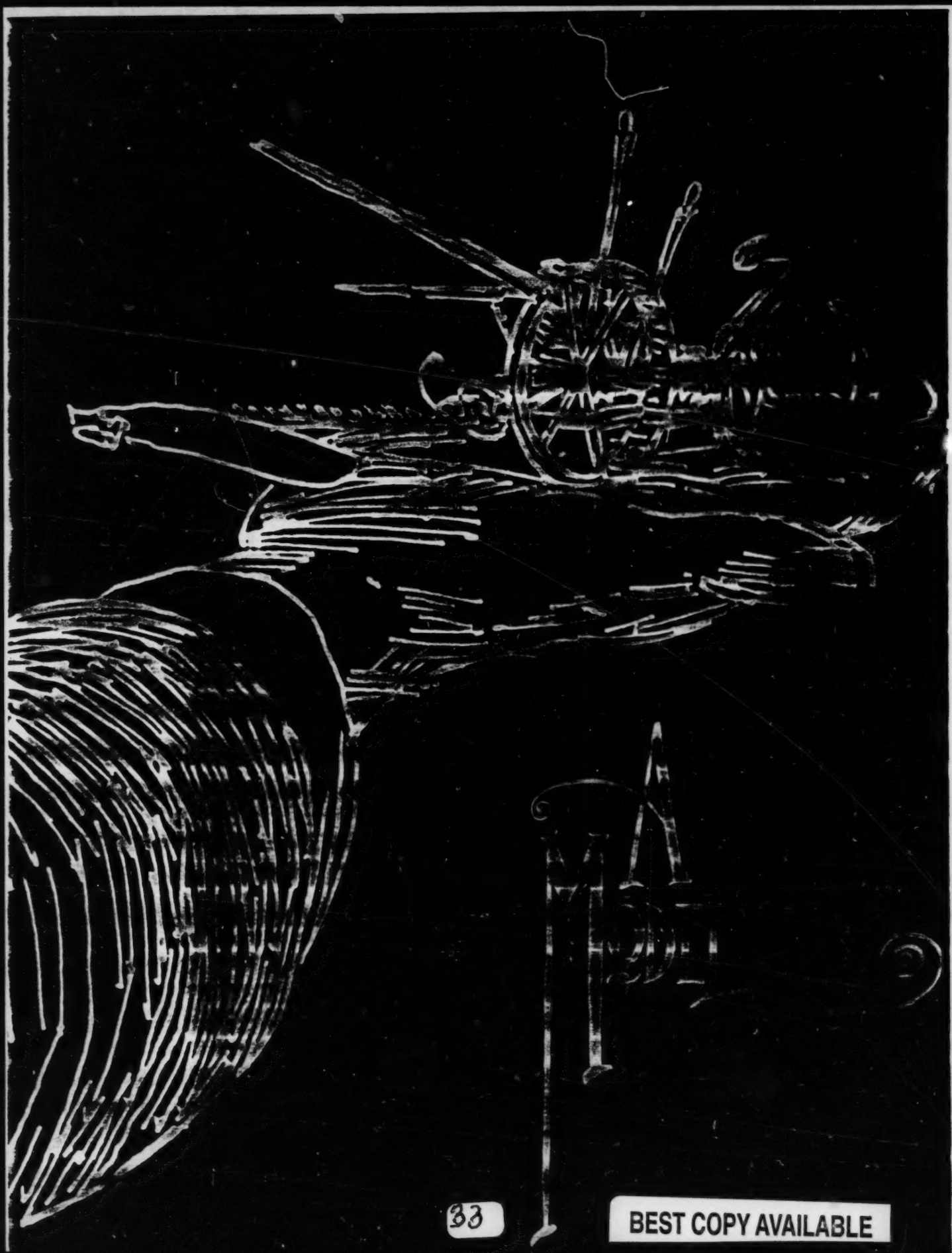
As a follow-up activity, have the students try their hands at writing a conversation between two or more people. Here are some possible scenarios around which they could build their conversations:

two characters in a book arguing for a different ending

someone trying to explain a modern event, situation, or object to a person from the past

a conversation between two or more people "on the scene" at a historic event, such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the arrival of Europeans in the Americas

a conversation between two or more people "on the scene" at a future significant event, such as the arrival of aliens on Earth or the discovery of a cure for cancer



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EXPLAINING HOW THINGS WORK

Museums don't just collect things — they also preserve them and study how they are or have been used. Often, museums bring this knowledge to life through interactive exhibits and demonstrations. In this activity students will use a demonstration of how something works or how to do something as a basis for writing. As they observe the demonstration, they'll take notes, make sketches, and sequence actions. Then they'll select the relevant details for descriptive essays explaining the process they observed.

Overview

After watching a demonstration or learning how to do something, students write an essay explaining the process to someone who has never seen it.

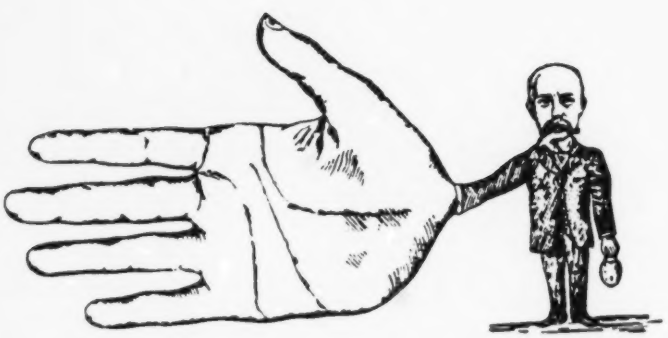
Objectives

Students will be able to:

- take detailed notes
- sequence a set of steps in a logical order
- write directions or instructions for a specific audience

Materials

paper and pens or pencils; clipboards



Preparation

1. Locate a local museum or historic site that conducts demonstrations. (As an alternative, locate a site that provides hands-on experiences.)

Explain to a museum educator that you would like to arrange to have your class observe a staff member demonstrating one or two processes, such as butter churning, typesetting, Japanese paper folding (origami), or bird banding. Or, ask if you can reserve enough time in a hands-on exhibit so that a demonstrator can help groups of students learn how to do something that's highlighted in the exhibit.

If possible, arrange to see two different demonstrations. Divide the class into two groups, and have the groups serve as audiences for each other's writing. The groups can exchange and evaluate each other's draft essays.

2. Ask for the demonstrator's cooperation.

Tell the demonstrator what you are doing and why. Explain the demonstration's connection to your curriculum and mention that the demonstration is being used as the basis for a writing activity. Ask the demonstrator to allow enough time to pause now and then so students can ask questions and take notes. Also ask for a list of terms he or she will be using.

3. Gather materials relevant to the demonstration.

If, for example, students will be seeing a demonstration about clothmaking in the 17th and 18th centuries, find pictures of clothing from that time to show to them. Obtain samples of the types of cloth used for clothing during these times. You might also want to ask the librarian to recommend relevant books or videotapes.

In the Classroom

1. Introduce the activity with a demonstration.

To help students think about the kind of writing they will be doing in this activity, ask them what the following types of writing have in common:

- recipes
- rules of play that come with games
- instructions that come with things that have to be put together
- "how-to" books

(All have clear, logical steps for the reader to follow; they usually assume that the reader has no previous knowledge of how to do the process or task.)

Now demonstrate or have a student demonstrate a very simple process such as sharpening a pencil. Ask the students how they would explain this process to a visitor from another planet or someone from a very different culture. What would they say is the first step? (It may be useful to perform the task more than once, allowing students to stop the action so they can make a list of each step on the board.)

Discuss how important it is to keep the reader in mind: The writer of instructions can't assume the reader will know anything about what is being described. That means, for example, that steps in sharpening a pencil would have to include which end of the pencil to sharpen, which way to turn the handle of the sharpener, how fast to turn the handle, and so on.

2. Set the stage for the demonstration the students will be writing about.

Using the materials you gathered in step 3 of the preparation section, provide a context for the demonstration. If, for example, the students will be seeing a demonstration of bird banding, you could discuss the relevance of this activity and its ramifications for scientific research. If students will be watching a demonstration of glassblowing, discuss how industrialization and automation changed how glass products are made.

At the Museum

1. Gather the students so that they can see and hear the demonstrator and take notes.

Tell students to take careful and detailed notes and to be as actively involved in the demonstration as is possible. Suggest that they make sketches or diagrams, label the parts of objects, and write down unfamiliar terms. Tell them not to be shy about asking the demonstrator to define such terms.

2. Allow enough time for students to see a complete demonstration and to finish their notes before leaving the museum.

Tell students that they will base their essays solely on the demonstration and that they will not be able to use other sources of information. Thus they will need to ask all of their questions and finish their notes and sketches before they leave.

Back in the Classroom

1. Have students write their essays.

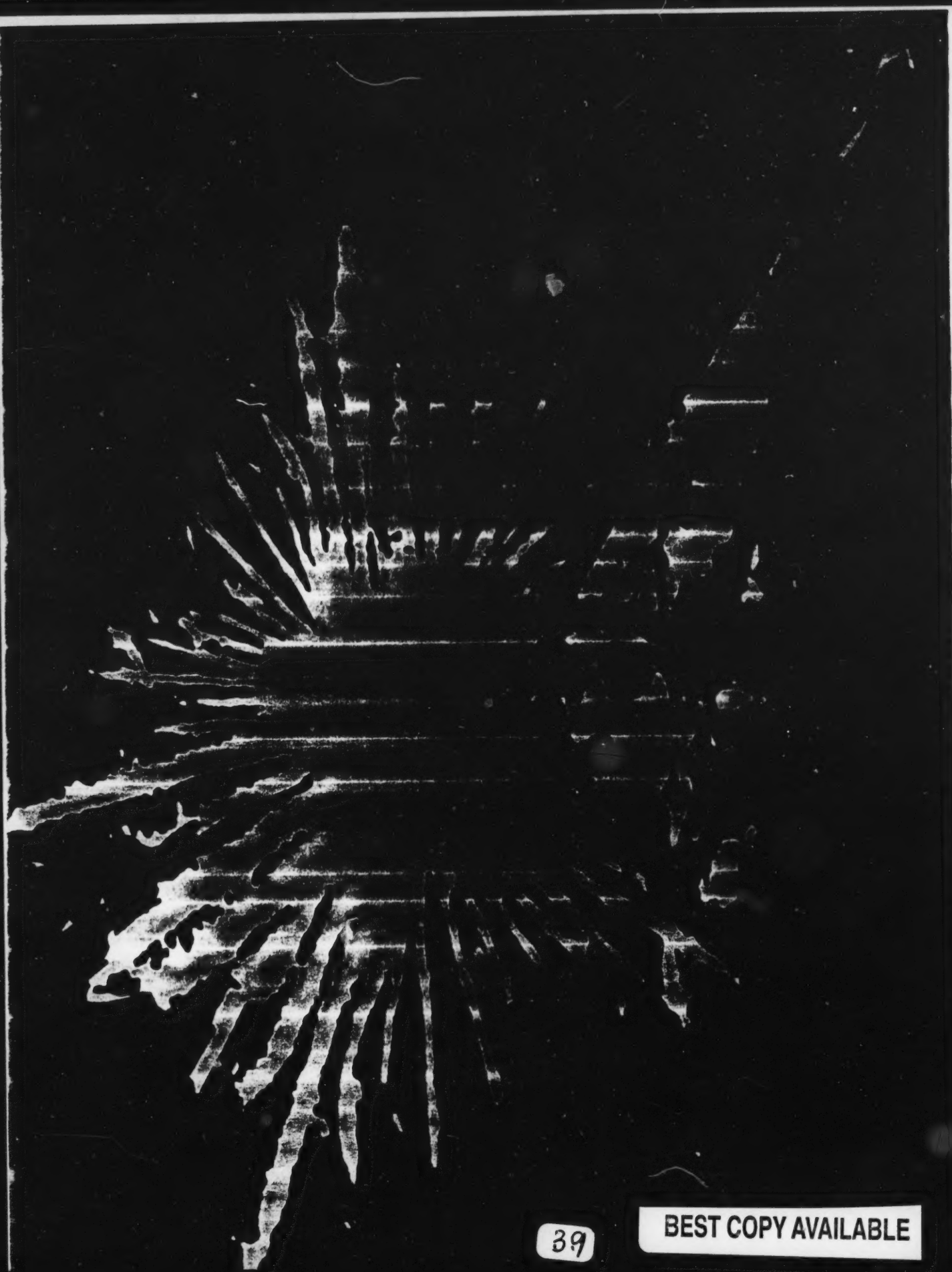
Have students decide whether they want to illustrate their essays and make covers for them. Remind students that, in this case, the purpose of illustrations is to help the reader understand the text.

2. Have students exchange and evaluate each other's draft essays.

Have a discussion in which students decide how they will evaluate the essays. By what criteria do readers judge the success of a cookbook recipe or instructions for assembling or installing something? What criteria will they use for the essays? Where is the writing obscure or confusing? How can the essay be improved?

Or, if you were able to have two different groups of students observe two different demonstrations, have student volunteers set up a mock demonstration that is based on one or more essays of the process they did *not* observe. Have students evaluate the effectiveness of the writing based on these demonstrations.

It would also be helpful to get the demonstrator to read some of the essays and offer his or her comments to the students.



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TELLING YOUR STORY

How did it feel to be a suffragist picketing outside the White House? Or a 19th-century inventor struggling through a year of experimentation? In this activity your students can "experience" the past by writing a story from the point of view of someone who lived during another time. For factual information and inspiration, they'll study a historical exhibition focusing on a particular era or event.

Overview

Students use historical information from an exhibition to write a story from the point of view of someone who lived in the past.

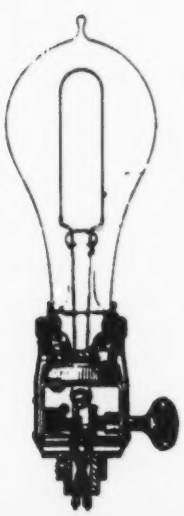
Objectives

Students will be able to:

- identify a particular time period and describe several of its characteristics
- describe what daily life was like during this time period
- write a story about someone who lived during this time period

Materials

paper and pens or pencils; clipboards; copies of pages 46 and 47



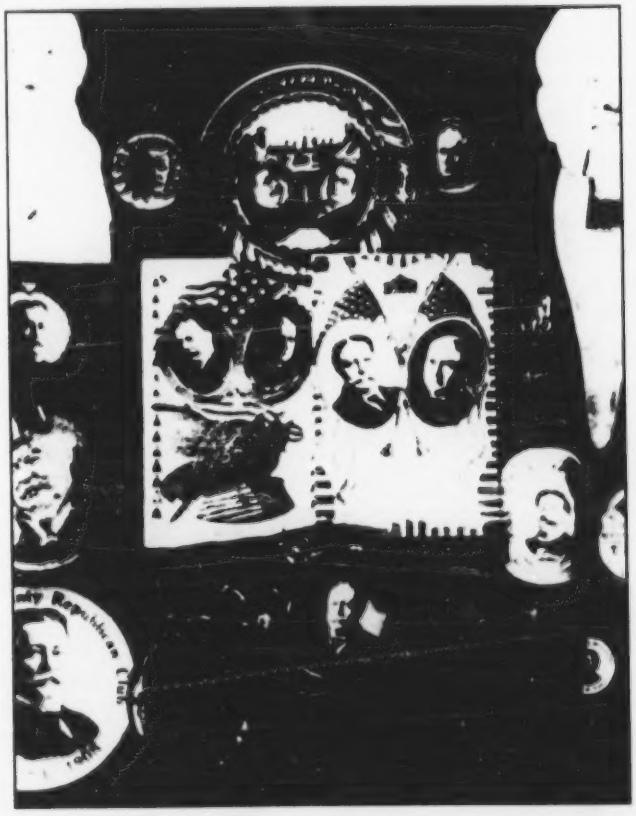
Preparation

1. Locate a museum exhibition or display that focuses on a past event or era in human history.

Look for exhibitions that include dioramas of people and places, as well as plenty of primary source objects and information from the period being portrayed—such exhibitions will help fire students' imaginations. (Other possible locations for this activity include historic houses, re-enactment villages, and exhibits that concentrate on a particular culture.)

2. Make copies of "What Was It Like?" (page 46) and "Who Am I?" (page 47)—one for each student.

Modify these handouts as necessary, based on the exhibition your students will be visiting. You'll be distributing the handouts once you get to the field-trip site.



In the Classroom

1. Introduce the activity.

Explain to the students that they will be writing historical stories. Ask for examples of any such stories the students may have read or of historical movies and TV programs they've seen. Brainstorm a list of things authors and filmmakers can do to convey a sense of what life was like in the time period being portrayed.

2. Discuss the importance of research in creating a good historical story.

Ask students how authors and filmmakers can gather information when they are writing novels or scripts set in the past. Point out that one crucial element of a good historical story is accurate research. Many authors of historical stories spend a great deal of time researching the era they're writing about. They talk with experts, study historical documents, look at pictures, read diaries and newspapers, and do whatever else is necessary to obtain accurate information.

Research not only helps authors get their facts straight—it also gives them a feeling for the period they're writing about and for the daily lives of the people who lived during that time. Explain to the students that they will be using a museum exhibit as a source of factual information for their stories.

At the Museum

1. Walk students through the exhibition.

Allow fifteen minutes or more for walking through the exhibition with students so they can get a feeling for its scope and for the kind of information they can include in their stories.

2. Give students time to collect data.

Distribute copies of "What Was It Like?" (page 46). Explain that the sheet is a research tool, and that the more data the students jot down on their sheets, the more information they'll be able to draw on later when writing their stories. Then give the students at least thirty minutes to return to the exhibition and fill in as much of their sheets as possible. Afterward, you may want to have the students gather to share the details they noted and to ask questions.

3. Have each student choose an identity.

The identities students choose will be the main characters in their stories. Students may either invent their identities—for example, someone might imagine himself or herself a fifteen-year-old migrant farm worker—or they may adopt the identity of a real person portrayed or discussed in the exhibit. Distribute copies of "Who Am I?" (page 47) and give the students a few minutes to fill in the first four questions on the handout.

4. Give students time to collect additional data.

Have the students return to the exhibit to fill in as much of their new handouts as they can. Explain that the additional information they gather may come in handy when they sit down to write their stories. Tell them to be on the lookout especially for any information that could help them develop their characters. For example, if the exhibit reveals that few children of farm laborers attended school, a student who has chosen the identity of a farm laborer can assume that his or her character has little formal education.

Back in the Classroom

1. Conduct a brief review to help students get ready to write their stories.

First, review the typical elements of a story—specifically, characters, plot, and setting. Lead a discussion in which students describe the most appealing features of stories they have read or seen on film, and write their ideas on an overhead or on the chalkboard. Suggest to students that they might want to keep these features in mind as they write their own stories.

Next, review with students what they saw in the exhibition, as well as characteristics of the time period it portrayed. Compare the time period to the present time.

2. If possible, choose an audience for the students' stories.

A real audience can help writers focus. They must decide, for example, what they want their readers to know about a subject, and how best to describe things to people who might not be familiar with the subject. Try to determine a specific audience that the students' stories can target. If another class is studying the time period your students will be writing about, perhaps your group could share their finished stories with this class. They could read their stories to the group, perform them as plays, or publish and distribute them.

If it's feasible for your students to write for a specific audience, explain that, like all authors, they must try to decide what information and qualities such an audience will appreciate. For example, younger students may not be able to follow an in-depth explanation of Civil War politics and battle strategies—but a general explanation of why the war occurred might suffice, as long as it remains true to the facts.

3. Have students write drafts of their stories.

Encourage the students to remain as true as possible to the circumstances of life in the past and to be especially careful to avoid using contemporary colloquialisms and attitudes in their stories. Suggest that they visit the library to do additional research, if necessary.

4. Have students work in groups to revise their stories.

Students can act as editors of each others' work. Explain that their jobs as editors involve more than just finding spelling and grammar mistakes. They can also point out where the story catches their interest and where it doesn't, where the story becomes unrealistic, and so on.

Student Writing

Mary Martha Rockwell's eighth-grade history students visited the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History to write the following essays. They attend St. Peter's Interparish School in Washington D.C.

Today was my tenth birthday and my parents bought me a brand-spanky new penny bicycle. It's a burgundy red with chrome spokes and handlebars. The tires are pink rubber. The pedals are nicely greased, so I can go real fast. I decided to show all my friends my penny-bicycle. Since it was Sunday I knew they were at the park playing marbles, so I went inside to get my lucky marble "Bertha."

I headed down the street and decided to take the long way so I could get to know my bicycle and test it out. I think I'm on "Cloud 9" when the wind blows through my hair and I get goose bumps all over from the wind blowing against me. I love my new bicycle because it lets me be free and go where I want to go.

Soon I got to the park where my friends were just finishing a round of marbles. I joined them with my lucky marble "Bertha" and played until the rain started to come down and I headed home.

Rachel S. Flumn

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The Telegraph

I love using the newly invented machine, the telegraph. It is very hard to use because you must listen intently or find one of the few people who know how to use it. They listen, and by that time you've missed half of your message. Sometimes, you don't know exactly which letter of the alphabet the people sending the message are trying to send because everyone doesn't pause for the same amount of time. I think it's neat to tap the button, but I may be sending a message I don't mean. Most of the time, there is a long line to use the telegraph, and it takes some people a long time to put their message through. Also some people send pages at a time and it's not fair for others who are on a deadline. I think there should be a limit on how much anyone can send at once, and those people with a lot to send should use the mail. I think it was a great invention, and I can tell my cousin something urgent in Oklahoma when I live in Nebraska. This invention may evolve into something else, but it has already had an impact on my life.

Travelle Franklin-Ford

Dear Diary,

Bloody corpses, men in pain, and horrible screams and noises as the fierce war goes on. These horrible things I have mentioned are the least I must worry about. The land that once many animals roamed, blue sky as far as the eye can see, and a feeling of safety have been interrupted by brutal bloodshed and torture. To think I am the leader, the leader of the death—

Sometimes, I just don't think I can take it anymore, but with the help of dear God, o Mighty Jesus, I think I can survive.

Journal of George Washington

Eacel Pogue

I don't know whether it was the rats or my friend that woke me on that long day. I got dressed in my ragged, torn clothes and went to my place on the deck immediately.

Although the cannon fire was loud, I recall hearing the captain say, "Look! British off the port bow!"

I took a bit of cornbread and loaded my powder. With a "BOOM!" my cannon ball sailed off towards the horizon. I hit the mast of a Red Coat ship, just making a dent.

The battle raged for about 2 hours, but in the end all the colonial ships had been sunk. I guess it's up for George's boys, because those Red Coats while we all freeze in this frigid water waiting for help.

Journal of Jack B. Taylor, devoted colonial

Chris Russell and Eddie Johnston

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Worksheet

What Was It Like?

What was it like to live during the time depicted in this exhibition? For each of the following categories, record as many details of daily life as you can. You can also add any categories that are not included here.

Exhibition title:

Clothing

Play

Dwellings

Transportation

Food

Religion

Home life

The arts

Health

Science

Work

Famous people

'orksheet

Who Am I?

Answer the following questions about the person you've chosen to be:

What is your name? _____

How old are you? _____

Where do you live? _____

Who are the members of your family? _____

_____

Now visit the exhibition again with your new identity in mind. Examine the objects and displays for any information they reveal about your new identity, and answer the following questions. Use the back of the page if you need more space.

1 What kind of clothes do you wear? _____

_____

2. What do you look like? _____

_____

3. Describe your home. _____

_____

4. Do you have a job? If so, describe what you do and what conditions are like on the job.

_____

5. What do you do for fun? _____

6. What kinds of food do you eat? _____

7. What hardships do you face? _____

_____

8. Which machines, conveniences, or technologies do you use every day? _____

_____

9. What are the major differences between your life and modern life? _____

_____

10. Describe how world, national, or local events have affected you. _____

_____

11. What do you hope for? _____

12. What or whom do you fear? _____

13. Whom do you admire? _____

14. What are your beliefs? (religious, political, personal, and so on) _____

_____

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CREATING A CLASSROOM MUSEUM

By planning, designing, and building their own museum exhibition, your students can bring the learning experiences museums have to offer to others in your school. They'll learn to convey information by writing labels and other pieces for the objects in the exhibition—and in the process, they'll sharpen their data-gathering, organizational, and problem-solving skills.

Overview

Students create a museum exhibition based on a theme of their choosing, using items they've brought to the classroom.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- choose a theme for a museum exhibition
- select appropriate objects and other materials for the exhibition
- devise a plan for laying out and building the exhibition
- write concise interpretive materials for the exhibition
- determine which of the exhibition's elements would attract an audience and compose promotional pieces or brochures for the exhibition

Materials

paper and pens or pencils; objects for the exhibition; poster board; other materials as needed for building the exhibition

1. Assess the space available for a student exhibition.

Your exhibition can be as big or small as you and your students want it to be. If you prefer to keep it small, you could limit the exhibition to an area inside the classroom itself or to a display case in the hallway. A common area in the school will work for more elaborate exhibitions. You might also want to consider having the students set up their exhibition in a community center, library, or other area outside the school. If you choose this option, you may need to make arrangements some time in advance.

2. If students will be bringing objects from home, write a note explaining the project to parents.

Be sure to explain in your note that you can't guarantee the objects' safety. (Students needn't be limited to bringing objects from home—you can also have them make crafts or other objects.)

3. If possible, arrange to have a museum staff person available to answer questions at the museum.

The students will be visiting the museum to get a feeling for how exhibitions are put together, and to get ideas for their own exhibition. A museum staff person, docent, or other person who is very familiar with the exhibitions and how they were created can answer students' questions and shed light on the process of planning an exhibition. Such a person can also discuss ways objects and information are presented in exhibitions, such as in *dioramas* (three-dimensional representations of particular scenes), *case exhibits* (objects arranged inside a glass-fronted case), *period rooms* (actual or recreated rooms using authentic objects from a certain time period), and so on.

4. If possible, set up a behind-the-scenes tour.

A tour of an exhibition in the process of being built can help students see the steps that go into bringing an exhibition to life.

5. Ask for an exhibition script and photos.

Ask if the museum will lend you a copy of an exhibition script. Many museums make scripts available upon request. (Since scripts can be hundreds of pages long, you may want to ask for just a few pages.) A script will provide students with examples of the way an exhibition's written material is approached.

Also ask if you can borrow photos of the exhibition. Photos will be useful in helping students see how an exhibition's written material is arranged in relation to the objects on display.

6. Develop a questionnaire for students to fill out while at the museum.

To help students think about how exhibitions impart information to visitors, create a questionnaire that they can fill out while at the museum. Include questions such as the following:

Does the exhibition seem to be effective at presenting information to visitors? (Keep in mind that whether or not you personally like the subject matter isn't the point—what's important is whether or not the exhibition is successful at getting its information across.)

What do you like or dislike about how the exhibition is presented?

How are the objects positioned?

Does lighting play a role in the exhibition?

How are the objects protected from damage?

What are some other ways objects could be protected?

In the Classroom

***1. Clarify what is meant by* museum *and* exhibition.**

Ask students what constitutes a museum and present the definition of museums as places in which objects—often those of a historical, scientific, or artistic nature—are procured, cared for, studied, and displayed. Next ask for their ideas about how museum objects are arranged in their displays. Explain that they are usually tied together thematically into an *exhibition*. Ask the students for examples of exhibitions they've seen and the themes or subjects on which the exhibitions were based.

2. Have students brainstorm ideas for an exhibition.

Divide the class into groups of four or five and have them brainstorm possible themes for an exhibition of their own creation. To help the students get started, you might want to suggest possible themes, such as *When We Were Babies, Who We Are, Where We Live, Our Ancestors, Our Neighborhood, The History of Our School, Hobbies,* and *Friends*.

Tell the students to think about objects they could bring from home that would support the themes they come up with. Such objects should be capable of conveying information about the theme to the audience. Explain that the range of items students can bring in can include many different kinds of objects, such as books, photographs, cassette tapes, clothing, letters, items that symbolize an important event, and even worn or broken items. If students can't think of appropriate items for a particular theme, that's a good sign that the theme may not work as the focus of an exhibition.

3. Have the groups present their ideas.

Give the groups time to briefly present their exhibition themes. For each theme, have the students point out why it would make a good exhibition. Then have the class vote on the top two or three themes. Tell the students to write down these themes, leaving a few inches of space between each one. They'll be taking this list with them when they go to the museum.

At the Museum

1. Walk through one or more museum exhibitions with the students.

Explain that the main purpose of your walk-through is to get the students thinking about ways they can approach their own exhibition. Tell them to observe the exhibition with an eye toward how the information is presented. Hand out the questionnaires you made in step 6 of the preparation section and have the students fill them out as they go through the exhibition.

Also tell the students to think about whether or not some of the techniques in the exhibition would lend themselves to the themes they chose. For example, if the exhibition uses recorded music, the students may want to consider whether or not music would work (and be appropriate) in their exhibition. Have them write down any ideas the exhibition inspires under the appropriate themes on their list of the top two or three that the class came up with.

2. Give students time to talk with a museum staff person.

If you have been able to make arrangements to have a staff person on hand, encourage the students to ask any questions they might have about how an exhibition is put together. A staff person might also be able to provide specific ideas about how your students can approach their own exhibition.

Back in the Classroom

1. Have students vote on a final exhibition theme.

Ask students to share any exhibition ideas that their trip to the museum inspired. Discuss the pros and possible cons of each of the top exhibition themes, then have students vote on a final theme. Also have them brainstorm exhibition titles.

2. Have each student bring in one or more objects for the exhibition.

Put the students' objects on a table. Give everyone a chance to observe the goods, then have the students break into groups of four or five to brainstorm ways to organize the objects for display. Have the groups address the following questions:

Based on the objects students brought in, should the theme be revised or changed in any way?

Which objects are similar, and how are they similar? (Also consider any similarities between the *reasons* people chose certain objects.)

Which objects should be the first ones viewers see? Why?

Which objects should be the last ones viewers see? Why?

Based on their answers to these questions, and on any other ideas they discuss, have the groups write up a list of recommendations concerning how the exhibition should be set up.

3. Have students write labels for their objects.

Explain that, in museums, the word *label* refers to the panels of printed information in an exhibition. Then tell the students that they'll be responsible for writing labels for their own objects. List the following guidelines where everyone can see them. (If you were able to get a copy of an exhibition script, put it where the students can refer to it for ideas.)

Identify the object. (You might also want to state when it was created, if you know this information.)

Explain what it's made of.

State who owns the object. (You can also include why the object is important to the owner or to others.)

Point out any particular parts that the viewer should pay attention to and explain why they matter.

Keep your label short. (Remember that exhibition visitors don't want to spend all their time reading. Also keep in mind that exhibition space is limited.)

Explain that research is often an important part of setting up an exhibition. Curators try to find out as much as they can about the objects they're working with, in part so they can effectively interpret the object (in the form of written labels, in lectures, and so on) to exhibition visitors. Encourage the students to do any additional research, as necessary, on their objects. For example, if the object a student brings in belongs to a grandparent, perhaps the student could talk to the grandparent to find out more about the object.

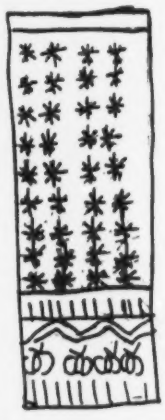
4. Have students revise their labels.

After the students finish writing, divide them into pairs or small groups and have them exchange the labels they've written. Tell them to try to read each others' work from the point of view of someone visiting the future exhibition and, if necessary, to comment on how the labels could be made clearer, more informative, livelier, and so on. Then have the students revise their labels. Have them copy their revised labels onto poster board for the exhibition. (Remind the students to write neatly and to make their letters large enough to be seen from several feet away.)

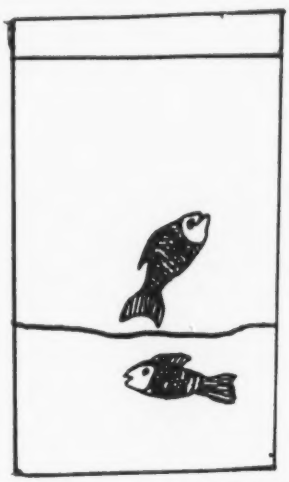
Students at Bailey's Elementary in Falls Church, Virginia, created an exhibition on international celebrations. They wrote these labels and preserved them in an exhibition catalogue. Their teacher was Peg Koetsch.

Type of Object: cup
Your Name: Kim Le
Loaned by: mother
Celebration: Halloween
Date of object: October 31
Artist: unknown
Country: United States of America
Materials made from: clay
Colors: blue and gray
Story: When my mother came to America, she worked for two people in their home. On Halloween the two people gave the cup to my mother. This cup holds many memories for my mother, because it reminds her of when she first came to America. She uses it for Halloween every year.

Type of Object: Laotian Traditional Dress
Name: Joliet Siboun Leuang
Loaned by: mother
Celebration: Laotian New Year
Date of object: New Year
Artist: unknown
Country: Laos
Materials made from: silk
Colors: Purple, gold
Story: At a Laotian New Year's everyone dances, sings and eats. Special clothing is worn by women at the celebration such as a dress or skirt and a blouse. Many special foods are eaten during this celebration such as egg rolls, noodles, chicken, roast pig, fried eggs and fruit. Special live music is played with Laotian instruments and songs are sung by everyone. Prayers are said and toasts to each other are made. Various types of gifts are given like clothes and toys. It is a fun time for everyone.



Type of Object: Money Envelope
Name: Tinh Te
Loaned by: Grandmother
Celebration: Chinese New Year
Date of object: unknown
Artist: unknown
Country: China - Vietnam - Cambodia
Materials made from: Red Paper
Colors: Red
Story: When it is Chinese New Year children get money in red envelopes from relatives and friends. The money is to bring good fortune and long life. Many people go to Washington, D.C. to watch the dragon dance on the Chinese New Year.



Type of Object: Pot (Deya)
Name: Judy Ramcharan
Loaned by: mother
Celebration: Dawalli
Date of object: Falls on different day, according to the year
Artist: unknown
Country: West Indies
Materials made from: clay, oil, and wick
Colors: tan
Story: On Dawalli, at night time, around midnight or 1 a.m., everyone from the family goes outside and lights up the Deyas and puts them on the ground. They stay lit until the wick is gone. Family comes over and we eat special foods. We listen to Indian music.

5. Have students work in groups to set up the exhibition.

Assign each group a different task to do in getting the exhibition ready for visitation. (Explain that, in museums, exhibitions are the result of teamwork.) Here are some suggestions for group tasks:

Floor Plan Group:

Designs the overall plan for the exhibition. Point out that traffic flow is one of the most crucial elements to keep in mind. (See the example of a floor plan, on page 48.) Have students give the recommendations they generated in step 2 to the members of this group. Encourage the group to consider these recommendations as they design the floor plan.

Graphics Group:

Makes all the large signs for the exhibition; writes final copy for introductory label (telling visitors what to expect) and final label (summarizing the entire exhibition), as well as any additional labels for various areas within the exhibit.

Construction Group:

Arranges tables and shelves and puts all objects into place. To provide ideas for how to arrange labels and objects, place any photos you were able to get from the museum exhibition in an area where everyone can refer to them. (Depending on time and materials, you

might also want to suggest that the students build simple display cases.)

Publicity Group:

Writes, edits, and distributes announcements and brochures about the exhibition. If the exhibition is accessible to the public, have the students write announcements and send them to local newspapers or radio stations.

Exhibition Guide Group:

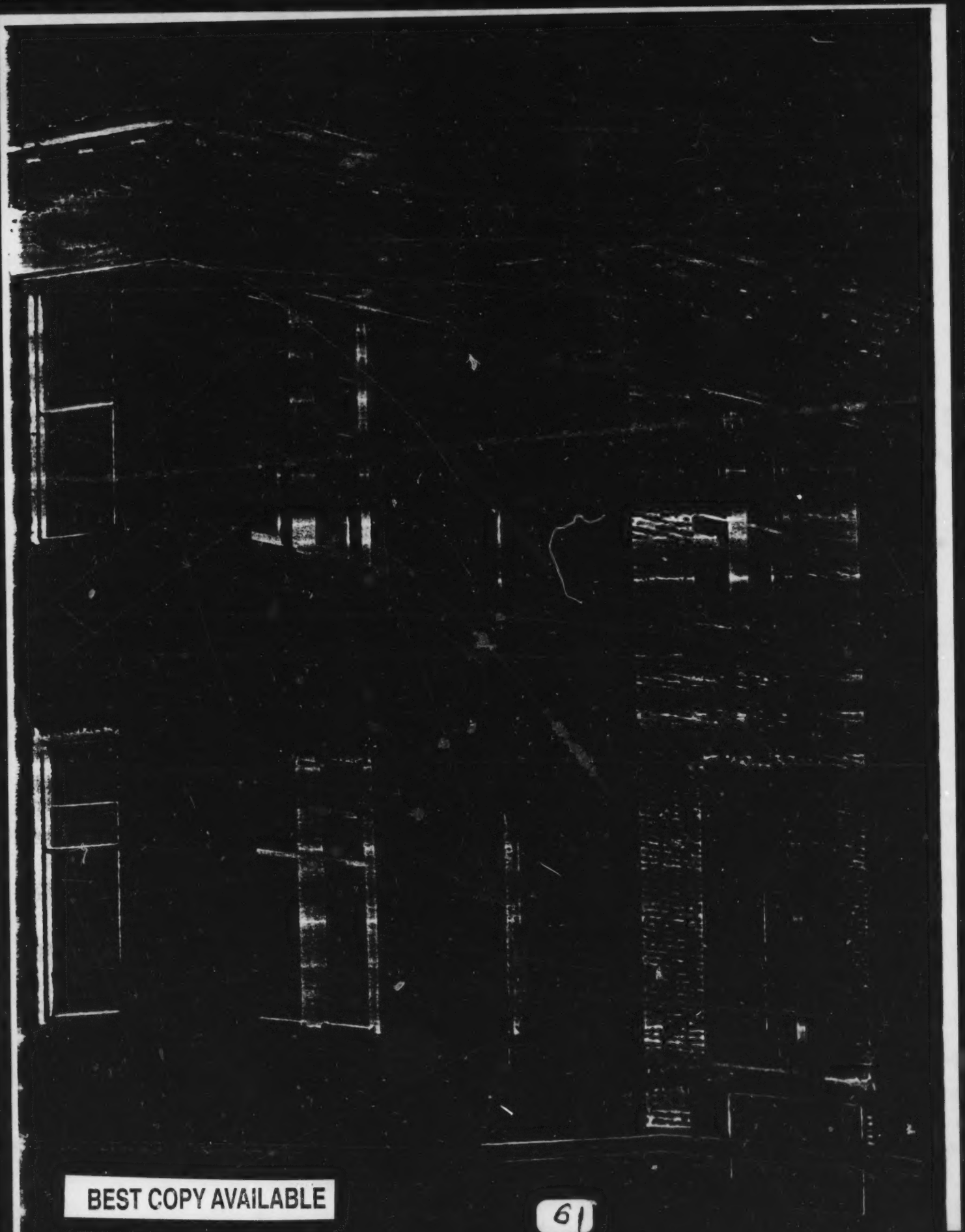
Writes, edits, and illustrates a brochure describing the exhibition's objects and theme. Provides any additional information that isn't included in labels. (Provide students with examples of such brochures—many museums produce them.) Have students put completed brochures in a prominent location near the entrance to the exhibition.

6. Invite visitors to come to the exhibition.

In addition to parents, school staff, and other students, you might want to consider inviting people from a local museum or historical society. Also consider having the students give tours of the exhibition, using narrations they've written themselves.

7. Revise the exhibition, as necessary.

Give students time to observe visitors in their exhibition. Explain that, while they're observing, they should try to keep in mind whether the exhibition seems to be serving visitors' needs and getting across the information students intended. For example, can visitors easily see displayed objects? Are labels positioned so that, to the extent possible, people who are reading them aren't obstructing other people's view? Suggest that students ask visitors for their feedback on the exhibition, then have the students work in groups to come up with any recommendations for improving the exhibition. If such improvements are feasible, have the students make the necessary changes.



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BEYOND THE MUSEUM

Think of your community as a big museum. Now think of all the objects and exhibitions in this museum: old buildings, artifacts, statues, monuments—resources that, like the objects and exhibitions in real museums, offer primary-source information about history and culture. By using these and other "hidden" community resources as a foundation for new activities, you can help make your community come alive for students.

But you needn't limit yourself to motivating students with those community treasures that are steeped in the distant past or that represent culture at its most refined. The present, and the popular culture that "speaks" to students, may be the most effective motivators of all.

Following are some suggestions for ways you can make the most out of what your community has to offer—specifically, as a means of inspiring student writing. No doubt you'll think of other ideas too; ideas that take advantage of the unique attributes of your neighborhood, school, and other resources. Good luck—and please feel free to share your ideas with us. We'd like to hear from you.

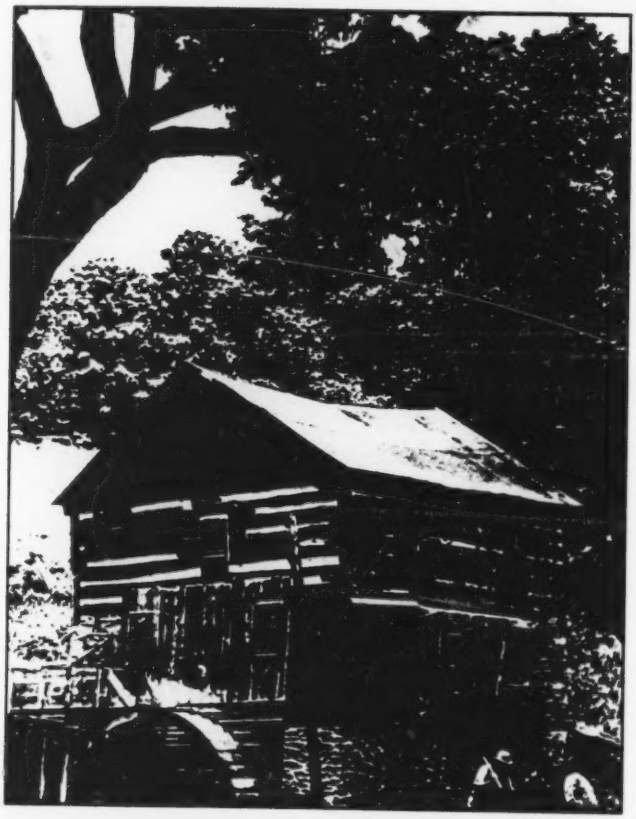
Have students survey old homes in the community. Groups of students focusing on one or more houses could find out about the history of a particular home, then write a real estate ad that incorporates some of the historical information they discovered.

Find out about the concerts, festivals, and other entertainment events that will be occurring in your area. Have students create a calendar of events, complete with descriptions of each event.

Have students write about the history of your school. They could also research and write about the first schools in the area.

Are there artists or scientists in your community whose work focuses on past life in the area? If so, have students interview them. They could also interview antique dealers to find out what kinds of old objects the dealers get from the community. Have students publish their interviews in the school newspaper.

Have students write and illustrate books for younger students focusing on notable people in your community.



Divide students into groups and have each group focus on a different aspect of, or area within, the community. Each group can contribute photos and other items to a community scrapbook. Have the groups write captions for their contributions.

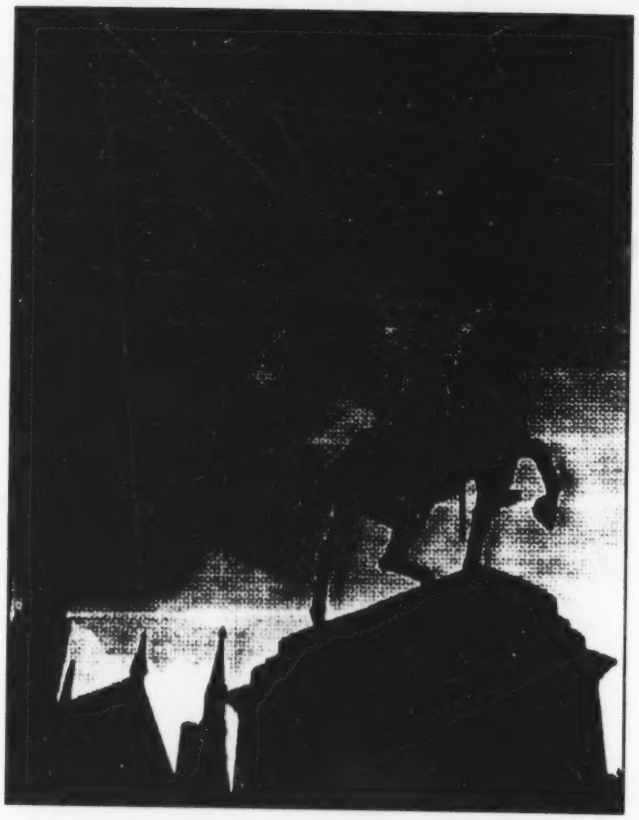
If there are controversies in your neighborhood over historic preservation, encourage the students to write editorials about the issues.

Have the students start a column in the school newspaper featuring "day-in-the-life" pieces that focus on life in the past. They could also write short blurbs for an "On This Day in History..." column.

Have students collect information about popular fashions in the school. They could use their findings to write news features about different fashions.

Have students write pieces about collections they have at home. Encourage them to try unconventional ways of presenting the information—e.g., through poetry, plays, dialogue, and so on.

Have students write and illustrate comic strips or comic books about past life in your community.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

Atwell, Nancie, ed.
Coming to Know: Writing to Learn in the Intermediate Grades.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1989.

A set of articles written by teachers about approaches to writing in the content areas. Discusses ways to help children produce report writing that is as immediate as their personal writing. Chapter titles illustrate the book's focus: "Letters to a Math Teacher"; "A Puffin Is a Bird, I Think."

Calkins, Lucy McCormick, with Shelley Harwayne.
Living Between the Lines.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1990.

Written in collaboration with Teachers College Writing Project staff, this book offers new ideas for reading-writing workshops. Also discusses "notebooking," a 1990s version of journal writing.

Elbow, Peter.
Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

A collection of essays that explores the conflicting pressures of teaching writing and how to resolve them. Discusses teachers' and students' ideas about authority, instruction, and evaluation.

Elbow, Peter.
Writing Without Teachers.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Elbow disputes the idea that writers compose linearly from outline to final draft. He offers another model of the composing process, beginning with freewriting and ending with peer review.

Gillis, Candida.
The Community as Classroom: Integrating School and Community Through Language Arts.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1991.

This activity-filled book suggests ways that students can develop their language skills through community-based learning experiences.

Macrorie, Ken.
The I-Search Paper:* Revised Edition of *Searching Writing.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1988.

Macrorie shows students and teachers how to do an I-Search research project—a primary-source research method reported in a narrative style.

Moffett, James.
***Active Voice: A Writing Program Across the Curriculum,* 2d ed.**
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1992.

The first edition of *Active Voice* can be credited with helping establish the process approach to teaching writing. The new edition, with student writing samples, continues to offer useful suggestions at both the writing program and writing topic levels.

Moffet, James, and Betty Jane Wagner.
***Student-Centered Language Arts, K-12,* 4th ed.**
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1991.

One of the most comprehensive texts on language arts teaching, this 460-page book discusses such topics as "Individualization, Interaction, Integration: Making Schooling More Effective"; "Labels and Captions: Signs, Exhibits, Maps, Charts"; "Writing from Recollection" and "Writing from Investigation."

Ponsot, Marie, and Rosemary Deen.
Beat Not the Poor Desk: Writing—What to Teach, How to Teach It and Why.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1982.

Offers an inductive approach to teaching

writing. Students develop an understanding of rhetorical structures inductively and apply them to new writing situations, especially the essay.

Routman, Regie.
Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1991.

A specific and warmly written book on the practical aspects of the whole language classroom. Contains an extensive annotated list of teacher resources.

Other Sources of Information

Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, eds.
***The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing,* 3d ed.**
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

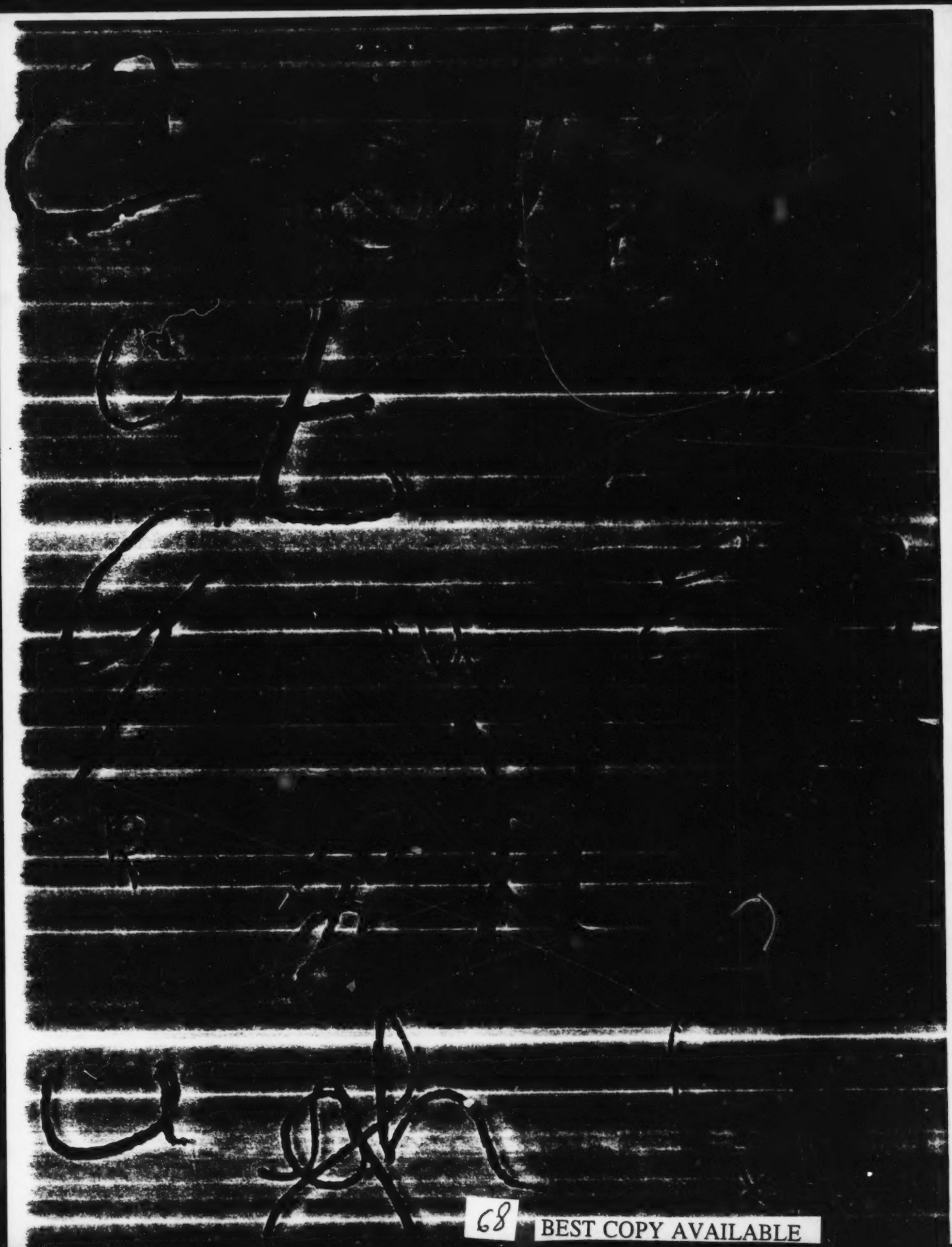
An extensive bibliography of materials that the editors describe as "helpful to practicing writing teachers." Write to St. Martin's Press, Department GS, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010, or call 1-800-446-8923.

ERIC (the Educational Resources Information Center) is a database of educational materials collected by the U.S. Department of Education from 1966 to the present. It consists of two subfiles: Resources in Education (RIE), which offers access to current research findings, unpublished manuscripts, books, and technical reports, and Current Index to Journals in Education (CJIE), which covers 750 journals and serial publications.

National Council of Teachers of Englisn offers books, audiocassettes, videotapes, and position statements on all aspects of English teaching, and publishes the following professional journals: *Language Arts, English Journal,* and *College English* for elementary, secondary, and college teachers, respectively. It also publishes four other periodicals: *Research in the Teaching of English, Teaching English in the Two-Year College, The SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English) Newsletter,* and *The Quarterly Review of Doublespeak.* For more information contact the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Telephone: (217) 328-3870; FAX (217) 328-9645.

Heinemann/Boynton-Cook is a leading publisher of books for English teachers. The catalog, which continues to expand, includes books that extend the approach to teaching and learning in the language arts into the areas of math, science, art, music, drama, and social studies. A separate catalog for high school and college English teachers. For more information contact Heinemann/Boynton-Cook, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801-3959. Telephone: 1-800-541-2086.

The National Writing Project is a nationwide program designed to improve student writing and the teaching of writing. The program offers workshops, seminars, research programs, and other opportunities. For more information contact The National Writing Project, 5627 Tolman Hall, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720. Telephone: (510)642-0963.



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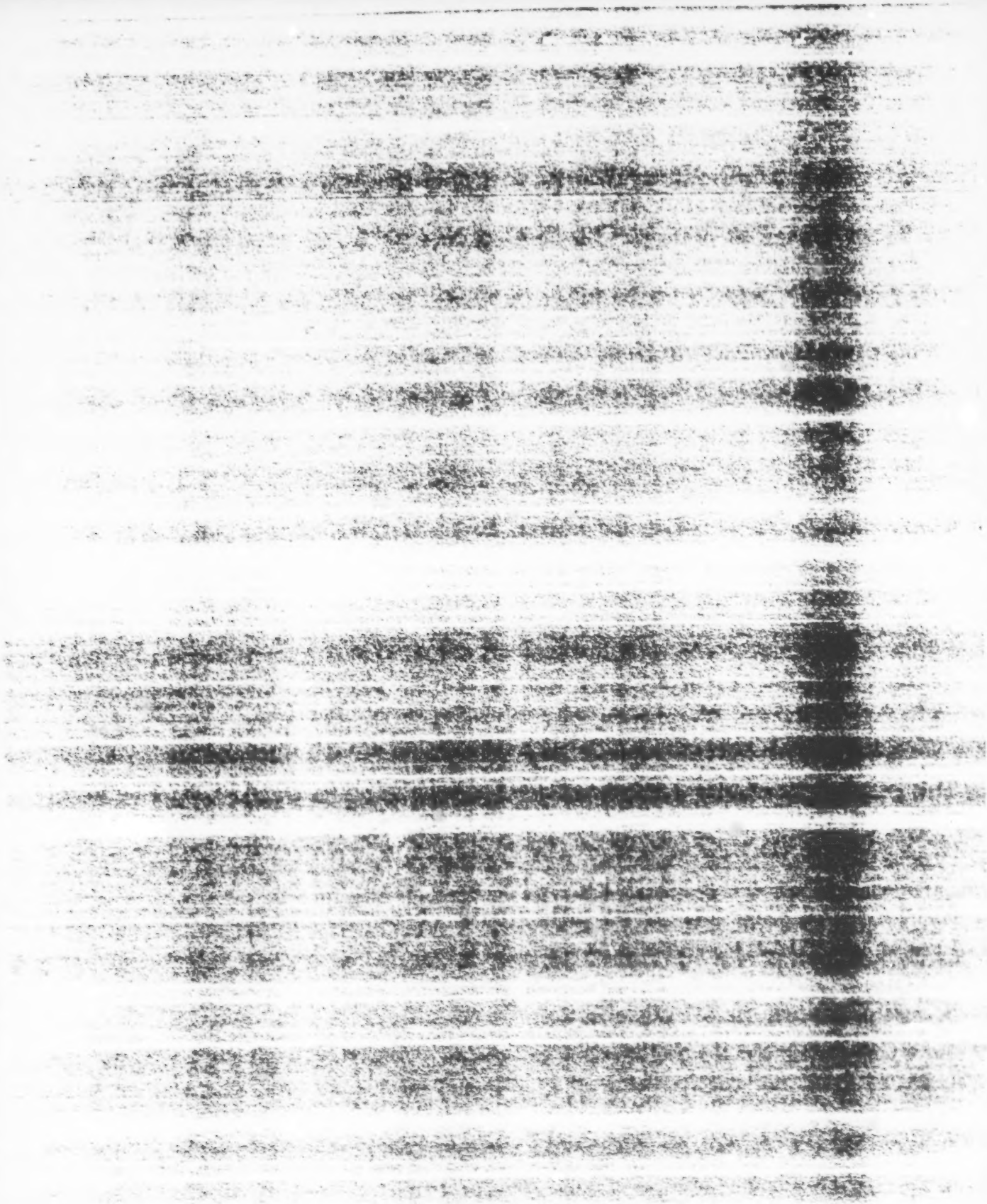

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